



CONNECTICUT RENAISSANCE

Reclaim your life

BOARD PRESIDENT
MARLENE DE BELLIS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
KATHLEEN DESCHENES

February 24, 2022

Good evening, Madame Chair and members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Kathleen Deschenes, CEO of CT Renaissance. Our organization serves about 3000 adults and adolescents every year. We employ 200 staff members that work in residential programs and outpatient clinics throughout CT.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. I'm here tonight to ask you to honor the long-term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and fund services by \$461 million over five years – or an additional 8% in Fiscal Year 2023.

Since 1967, our organization has provided mental health, drug, alcohol and gambling addiction services as well as programs that serve adolescents and adults involved in the criminal justice system. Our DMHAS funded programs include a 40-bed drug treatment program, a 20-bed programs for those with the co-occurring disorders of a mental illness and a substance use disorder, a gambling program, a behavioral health clinic and DWI program.

We, like all of our colleagues, are facing extreme staff shortages and difficulty recruiting employees. In our residential programs, our starting salary is \$13.75. In our two DMHAS residential programs, our staff come in to our programs everyday not knowing what to expect. They don't know if one of their clients will be:

- delusional
- hearing voices,
- suicidal,
- become physically aggressive,
- or if someone might overdose on heroin.
- Every staff member carries Narcan so that they can revive an overdosing client.
- Sometimes the Narcan isn't effective if the client has overdosed on fentanyl or carfentanyl. Sometimes our clients die of an overdose.

So, for \$13/hr, our staff take on this incredible and an often, life-saving responsibility. The work can be emotionally taxing and sometimes traumatizing.

For the same \$13-14 hourly wage, they could choose to make a coffee at Starbucks or stock shelves at the Home Depot – a far less risky and dangerous line of work that doesn't bear the responsibility of bringing someone back to life.

It takes a special kind of person to choose to work in our programs and serve this population. Please help CT Renaissance and organizations like us to provide a livable salary so that we can recruit and retain our workforce.

I will tell you, I have worked in the nonprofit sector for 35 years and I have never seen organizations at such a critical breaking point. We can't find staff and we can't hold on to the staff that we have. We can't afford the rising cost of food, gas, oil, health insurance and expenses in general. We are all exhausted. Staff are working double and triple shifts regularly. Management are covering day, evening and overnight shifts. It's unsustainable.

Human services are now in competition for staff with private companies. Clinical staff are being lured away by lucrative offers from school districts and telehealth companies. Across the state, The Alliance found that 18%, nearly 1 in 5, nonprofit jobs are vacant right now.

The Governor's proposed budget new behavioral health services and initiatives, for which we are supportive, but it does not provide support to existing programs that are struggling to keep up with the demand for services. **We urge the Appropriations Committee to fight for funding for these programs by implementing The Alliance's plan for a \$461 million increase.**

Thank you for support us this year and please continue to support the nonprofit sector. We can't survive without it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen Deschenes".

Kathleen Deschenes, CEO